



# THE GIPSIES.

## SYNOPSIS.

QUIET English scene—Contrast of a Gipsy camp.—The striking position of Gipsies, as exemplified in the influence which they exercise on society, and in their free and wandering life amongst the objects of external nature.—Description of their first appearance in Europe ; —the legend then related by them—their subsequent history, as under the influence of a Curse, exemplified in their remaining unchanged amongst all countries, while all else has changed—in the peculiarity that they alone of all nations are without associations of home or country—in the fact that their continual familiarity with natural beauty and solemnity has never awakened in them any feelings of religion.—Speculations as to their origin—from Scythia—from India—from Egypt.—Their position, as Egyptians, considered with reference to the Jews.—Hopes for the future—from regarding the Gipsies as in some measure a type of the human race—both in the analogy of their general character, and their restless life, as contrasted with the great want of our nature, Rest.

*Ἄφρητῶρ, ἀθέμιστος, ἀνέστιος.*

How sweet the scene—a shrine of deep repose  
And solemn calm amid a world of woes ;  
The forest-skirts, along whose leafy maze  
And tall grey stems the green light gently plays ;

The quiet lane, to whose wild hawthorn bowers  
 The infant spring entrusts her earliest flowers ;  
 The rose-clad cottages that cluster round,  
 Each with gay porch and plot of flowery ground ;  
 The patch of russet moor—the joyous scene  
 Of children sporting on the heathy green—  
 Is there a spot where Earth's dim daylight falls,  
 That with such power all evil thought appals ;  
 Where shade, air, waters—all beneath the dome  
 Of the blue sky, so speaks, so breathes of Home ?

Fond dreamer, pause ! Why floats the silvery wreath  
 Of light thin smoke from yonder bank of heath ?  
 What forms are those, beneath the shaggy trees,  
 In tattered tent, scarce sheltered from the breeze ?  
 The hoary father and the ancient dame,  
 The squalid children, cowering o'er the flame ?  
 These were not born by English hearths to dwell,  
 Or heed the carols of the village bell ;  
 Those swarthy lineaments—that wild attire—  
 Those stranger tones—bespeak an eastern sire ;  
 Bid us in Home's most favoured precincts trace  
 The houseless children of a homeless race ;  
 And, as in warning vision, seem to show  
 That man's best joys are dimmed by shades of woe.

Pilgrims of Earth ! who hath not owned the spell  
 That ever seems around your tents to dwell,

Solemn and thrilling as the nameless dread,  
That guards the chambers of the silent Dead?  
The sportive child, if near your camp he stray,  
Stands tranced with fear, and heeds no more his play;  
To gain your magic aid, the love-sick swain  
With hasty footstep threads the dusky lane;  
The passing traveller lingers, half in sport  
And half in awe, beside your savage court,  
While the weird hags explore his palm to spell  
What varied fates those mystic lines foretel.

Where be the Spirits that attend your will?  
Where your dread ministers for good and ill?  
The mighty storms your funeral dirges sing;  
The gladsome flowers to greet your footsteps spring;  
The murmuring streams your minstrel songs supply;  
The moss your couch, the oak your canopy;  
The sun awakes you as with trumpet-call—  
Lightly ye spring from slumber's gentle thrall;  
Eve draws her curtain o'er the burning west—  
Like forest birds ye sink at once to rest:  
The busy world, with all its glittering show  
Of outward grandeur and of inward woe,  
Mars not with morning cloud or noonday glare  
The ethereal freshness of your brighter air;  
Free as the winds that through the forest rush—  
Wild as the flowers that by the wayside blush—

Children of Nature, wandering to and fro,  
 Man knows not whence ye come, nor where ye go—  
 Like foreign weeds cast up on western strands,  
 Which stormy waves have borne from unknown lands;  
 Like murmuring shells to fancy's ear that tell<sup>1</sup>  
 The mystic secrets of their ocean cell.

Drear was the scene—a dark and troublous time—<sup>2</sup>  
 The Heaven all gloom, the wearied Earth all crime;  
 Men deemed they saw the unshackled Powers of ill  
 Rage in that storm, and work their perfect will:  
 Then, like a traveller, when the wild wind blows,  
 And black night flickers with the driving snows,  
 A stranger people mid that murky gloom  
 Knocked at the gates of awe-struck Christendom!  
 No clang of arms, no din of battle roared,  
 Round the still march of that mysterious horde;

<sup>1</sup> . . . . . Applying to his ear  
 The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell—  
 . . . . . murmurings from within  
 Were heard, sonorous cadences—whereby,  
 To his belief, the monitor expressed  
 Mysterious union with its native sea.

Wordsworth's Excursion.

<sup>2</sup> The Gipsies first appeared in Europe about the commencement of the fifteenth century, (Hoyland, p. 12.) a period of such universal misery in Christendom as to give rise to a popular opinion that it was the season in which Satan was loosed.

Weary and sad, arrayed in pilgrim guise,<sup>3</sup>  
They stood and prayed, nor raised their suppliant eyes;  
At once to Europe's hundred shores they came,  
In voice, in feature, and in garb the same;  
Mother, and babe, and youth, and hoary age,  
The haughty chieftain,<sup>4</sup> and the wizard sage:  
At once in every land went up the cry,  
"Oh! fear us not—receive us—or we die!"  
No lust of wealth, nor scent of distant war,  
Nor wisdom's glory lures them from afar;  
'Tis not for these the Children of the night  
Have burst at once on realms of life and light;  
'Tis the dread Curse—behind them and before—  
That goads them on, till time shall be no more;  
They claim no thrones—they only ask to share  
The common liberty of earth and air—  
Ask but for room to wander on alone  
Amid Earth's tribes unnoticed and unknown!

Few were their words, and broken was their tale,<sup>5</sup>  
Mixed with wild tears and penitential wail;

<sup>3</sup> When they first made their appearance in Europe, they pretended to be pilgrims.—Hoyland, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Thus at Paris they were led by twelve dukes.

<sup>5</sup> Their account of themselves amidst much variety seems to have agreed in this—that they were performing penance for past sin. Thus, in France, they gave out that they were condemned to a

A tale of dark unexpiated crime,  
 Of some dread Vision in the dim old time ;  
 They spake of lovely spots in eastern lands,  
 An isle of palms, amid a waste of sands—  
 Of white tents pitched beside a crystal well,  
 Where in past days their fathers loved to dwell ;  
 To that sweet islet came at day's decline  
 A Virgin Mother with her Babe Divine !<sup>6</sup>  
 She asked for shelter from the chill night breeze,  
 She prayed for rest beneath those stately trees ;  
 She asked in vain—what tho' was blended there  
 A maiden's meekness with a mother's care ;  
 What tho' the light of hidden Godhead smiled  
 In the bright features of that blessed Child,  
 She asked in vain—they heard, and heeded not,  
 And rudely drove her from the sheltering spot.  
 Then fell the Voice of Judgment from above,  
 " Who shut Love out, shall be shut out from Love ;"<sup>7</sup>

seven years' wandering for apostacy from the Christian faith.—Hoyland, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> "Aventinus delivereth, that they pretend for their vagabond course a judgment of God upon their forefathers, who refused to entertain the Virgin Mary and Jesus, when she fled into their country." Sir T. Browne, *Vulgar Errors*, book vi. c. 13.

<sup>7</sup> "And he that shuts Love out, in turn shall be  
 "Shut out from Love."

“ Who drive the houseless wanderer from their door,  
 “ Themselves shall wander houseless evermore ;  
 “ Till He, whom now they spurn, again shall come,  
 “ Amid the clouds of Heaven to speak their final doom.”

Scorn not the tale—for well might fancy trace  
 The hand of God upon that sinful race ;  
 Cities have fallen and empires passed away,  
 Earth's giant forms waxed hoary with decay ;  
 Since the lone people mid our moors and glades  
 Looked heedless round, as on a world of shades !  
 By German streams, thro' England's good green woods,  
 In Spain's deep vales, by India's ocean floods,  
 By desert moor, huge cliff, or willow grey,<sup>8</sup>  
 Still the dark Wanderers meet us on our way ;  
 Amid glad homes for ever doomed to roam  
 In lonely woe, themselves without a home !

The Negro slave returns in troubled dreams,  
 To moonlight dances by his palmy streams ;  
 The Scythian hails, amid the solemn glooms  
 Of dim ancestral groves, his fathers' tombs ;<sup>9</sup>  
 The wandering Israelite from year to year  
 Sees the Redeemer's conquering wheels draw near ;

<sup>8</sup> “ In Germany and Spain they shelter themselves under forests shaded by rocks ; and are partial to willows, under which they erect their sleeping places.”—Hoyland.

<sup>9</sup> See Herodotus, iv. 127.



Still dwells in thought, beneath the meteor light<sup>1</sup>  
Of Syrian skies by Zion's towery height ;  
Still loves on lonely Lebanon to gaze,  
Or track old Jordan through his thicket maze :<sup>2</sup>  
On these alone no solitary star  
Of ancient joy beams kindly from afar ;  
No altar-hearth is theirs ; no common shrine,  
The central birthplace of a mighty line ;  
No blazoned ancestry of hero sires  
In lowly hearts to waken high desires ;  
No lay, no legend of a glorious past,  
Its living light mid present shades to cast ;  
No blessed Isles, no rest beyond the grave ;  
No future King, omnipotent to save ;  
Even Nature's self, beneath whose constant eye  
They live and roam, in whose kind arms they die,  
In vain to them, with all a mother's love,  
Unfolds her charms around them and above ;  
The changeful smiles, the living face of light—  
The steady gaze of the still solemn night—

<sup>1</sup> "The morning rays of the East are not, as in Europe, a vague and confused light—but dart like arrows of fire of many colours from the common centre whence they all issue."—Lamartine's *Pilgrimage*, vol. ii. p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Jordan is almost concealed by the thick covering of wood along its banks.—*Ibid.* ii. p. 62, 64.

Earth—with her treasure-house of beauteous forms—  
 Air—with her vast array of calms and storms—  
 Bright lakes, the glistening eyes of solitude,  
 Girt with grey cliffs and folds of mighty wood—  
 All these are theirs—but still from year to year  
 To Nature's voice they turn a dull deaf ear ;  
 Spring's joyous burst, and Summer's golden prime,  
 Float o'er their senses like a drowsy chime ;  
 Autumn's wan leaves and Winter's death-like snows  
 To them alone, no solemn truths disclose ;  
 No hymn<sup>3</sup> of praise with Morn's bright incense blends,  
 Thro' Eve's deep calm no wonted prayer ascends ;  
 That sullen scowl, that wild and wanton leer  
 Ne'er smiles in peace, nor softens into fear ;  
 Yea, God and Man, the future and the past,  
 Are but to them a chaos dark and vast—  
 One gloomy Present, one unchanged To-day,  
 Stirred by no storm, and brightened by no ray.

Speak, ye wild winds from Scythian<sup>4</sup> plains that blow,  
 And tell this fearful mystery of woe !

Speak, glorious Ganges,<sup>5</sup> from the snowy cell  
 Of thy pure fountains—speak, if thou canst tell !

<sup>3</sup> For the absence of religion among the Gipsies, see Hoyland, p. 44, 45.

<sup>4</sup> Alluding to the theory which derives them from the Sigynnæ (Herodot. v. 9.) or from Tartary.

<sup>5</sup> Alluding to the theory deriving them from India.

Fled they of yore, as some would fondly deem,  
From the dank groves that veil thy sea-like stream,  
What time stern Timur, with his savage band,  
Burst like a storm o'er Brahma's shrinking land?  
Heard they the nations heave their long, last groans  
Amid the crash of Asia's thousand thrones?  
Speak, ye dead Forms, for countless ages hid  
By storied Sphinx or ancient Pyramid—  
If early bards their tale aright have told—  
Speak, for ye knew this wandering race of old,  
Speak the dread secret of your children's fall,  
And from the mist of years their golden times recall!

Say, can it be that while this world was young,  
While yet Heaven's glory round her childhood hung—  
In lonely splendour walked upon the earth  
The swarthy sires whence these derive their birth—  
Of giant power—of eagle's piercing ken—  
Wisest and mightiest of the sons of men?  
What if in yonder chief of tattered vest  
Glow the same blood that warmed a Pharaoh's breast?  
If in the fiery eye, the haughty mien,  
The tawny hue of yonder gipsy Queen,  
Still dwells the light of Cleopatra's charms,  
The winning grace that roused the world to arms,  
That called Rome's legions to a watery grave,  
And bound Earth's lord to be a woman's slave?

Lo, Mizraim's king-craft, of its glory reft,  
Is shrunk to petty deeds of midnight theft!  
Lo, Egypt's wisdom only lives to pry  
Thro' the dark arts of paltry palmistry!  
The salt that lacked all savour from above,  
The daring pride that knew no humble love,  
The priestly lore that worshipped all save God,  
Beneath the foot of man must evermore be trod!

Remnant of Ages—from thy glory cast—  
Dread link between the present and the past—  
Where are the tribes that bowed beneath thy might,  
That drank from thee as from a fount of light?  
One only race of all thy great compeers  
Still moves with thee along this vale of tears;  
Long since ye parted by the Red Sea strand;  
Now face to face ye meet in every land;  
Alone, amid a new-born world, ye dwell,  
Egypt's lorn people, outcast Israel!  
Like the two Forms<sup>6</sup> in sackcloth garb arrayed,  
By the rapt Seer from Patmos' shores surveyed—  
Prophets of ill, that stand in speechless woe  
On Earth's highway to bid the nations know—  
How fallen they, who shone so bright of yore,  
One skilled in human, one in holier lore—

<sup>6</sup> Rev. xi. 3.

How dark their fate, who turn to uses base  
 Earth's highest wisdom—Heaven's divinest grace!

Wanderers, farewell! 'Tis not for erring man  
 The mystic rule of God's decree to scan:  
 Dark is the past; yet still in clear expanse  
 The Future spreads to Hope's imploring glance;  
 It cannot be—so drear, so dark a spot  
 God's glorious Universe for aye should blot;  
 "It cannot be"—at once with awful cry—  
 The thousand kindreds of His earth reply:  
 "We, too, are fallen—we, too, in deserts stray,  
 "With bliss in sight—with home beside our way:  
 "We, too, are deaf to messages of love,  
 "Angels unheeded round our footsteps move:  
 "This is a solemn world<sup>7</sup>—a 'dreadful' spot—  
 "The gate of Heaven—and yet we know it not!"

Oh! weary days of promise long delayed—  
 Of glorious gifts with thankless scorn repaid—  
 When will ye end? Oh, when shall man's lost race  
 Among God's angels take its ancient place?  
 When shall this vagrant tribe of unknown birth  
 Regain her rank among the realms of Earth?

<sup>7</sup> Genesis xxviii. 16. "He said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

When shall lost Israel seek his Father's throne,  
And hail a holier Zion than his own ?

When shall God's Church her final rest attain,  
Pure from all blemish, washed from every stain ?

Peace—faithless murmurers ! Like the tranquil sky,  
Behind Earth's clouds, unseen, yet ever nigh,  
Though to and fro Man's restless hopes be driven,  
Still round us broods the changeless calm of Heaven ;  
Still He, who knew not where His head to lay,  
Who wearied sate beside the noontide way,  
He still would bid the lowering tempests cease  
That mar the vision of that perfect peace—  
With spell divine would lull the troubled breast,  
And call the wayworn Wanderers to His rest !  
There the lost pilgrim shall no longer roam,  
There the lorn outcast find a lasting home !

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